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Some Impressions of Veterinary Medicine in South America

Dean I. A. Merchant, D.V.M., Ph.D., C.P.H.

During the past summer I had the opportunity to visit the Colleges of Veterinary Medicine in Peru, Chile, Uruguay and Brazil, as a consultant for the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (World Health Organization). Most of the time was spent at Montevideo, Uruguay and Sao Paulo, Brazil surveying the educational facilities and methods used in the Colleges of Veterinary Medicine.

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of my impressions obtained, but I do wish to make pertinent comments of the educational situation found at the different places.

Veterinary medicine in South America has traditionally included animal husbandry as part of its obligation and function. In general, the course consists of four years and students are admitted immediately following high school, thus being where colleges in the United States were prior to 1930. In addition to rather elementary courses in animal husbandry, all of the professional courses found in our colleges are taught. The small number of students present in all of the schools allows the staff to do a rather thorough job of teaching. Examinations are given at the end of the year and are very difficult

and extensive. A student must know his subject matter or he does not pass. No exceptions to this rule are made, which compels the student to get his knowledge as the course progresses. All of the students I saw, and classes were in session, appeared older than those in the United States, but I was told they were not. Perhaps they looked older because practically all wore a mustache.

All students who wish to study in the university are admitted in all countries except Brazil. Here they must pass an entrance examination. In most countries, especially Uruguay, few students wish to enter the profession, consequently, those who do are interested, devoted students. Girls may enter the profession in all of the countries visited. No tuition is charged for university education. Upon graduation, veterinarians are usually employed by the government in disease control, animal production, meat inspection, laboratory research, laboratory diagnosis, or in the production of immunizing agents. There is little private practice as in the United States. As a result, most veterinary medical services are given free to the livestock owners.

So much for generalities, now a few comments on specific colleges.

The College of Veterinary Medicine at

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Lima, Peru has grown out of a cavalry school. The buildings are inadequate, but plans are underway for the construction of an entirely new school. This will be of great benefit to this college because they do have an enthusiastic young staff, many of whom have been educated in the States.

The College of Veterinary Medicine at Santiago, Chile has the most inadequate buildings of any I visited. They were in poor repair and not kept clean. A new building is under construction and possibly in a few years this school may be able to improve.

At Montevideo, Uruguay the buildings of the College of Veterinary Medicine are large and very adequate for the number of students enrolled. They are located in Pasteur Park, a tract of land very nicely landscaped. There were only 13 students in the first-year class, five of whom were girls. This fact does not indicate much interest in the profession in that country. If one realizes that the only national resources of this country are wool and meat the seriousness of the situation is recognized. All staff members work only one-half time, thus necessitating other employment with the government or private laboratories. Clinical material at this school is scant and library facilities are equally so. One of the essential needs of all schools is more books in Spanish so students will develop the habit of reading. Most knowledge is now obtained by lectures and laboratories. Scientific equipment is scarce at this college. Laboratory classes must meet in sections of not more than 10 students because of the small number of microscopes available.

One of the better colleges of veterinary medicine is found at Sao Paulo, Brazil. Although the buildings are old, the staff is employed full-time and the 30 students admitted each year are selected on the basis of competitive examinations. This college is in the process of moving to new quarters in University City, an area set aside for the University of Sao Paulo, simulating the university campus as we have in the United States. In the City of Sao Paulo a number of scientific insti-

tutes aid in the development of veterinary medicine and there is a strong relationship with the College of Medicine, in fact, the College of Veterinary Medicine was started by men from the College of Medicine.

In summary, colleges of veterinary medicine in South America are small and poorly supported. They lack buildings and equipment. Young men are not particularly interested in joining the profession, largely because of the lack of opportunity for employment after graduation. The prevalence of disease in animals, which constitute a large part of the natural resources of many of the South American countries, indicates that veterinary medicine must be developed and concerted efforts must be made to familiarize livestock owners with this fact. In other words, there is nothing wrong with the colleges of veterinary medicine in South America that money can't cure. Practically all of the diseases commonly found in animals may be found in South America. Foot and mouth disease is the most pressing problem, but this is kept under control in most countries where cattle are consistently vaccinated at least twice each year.

For continuous control of mild internal parasite infections in cattle, the worm-control drug, phenothiazine, can be fed in liquid molasses.

The first litter of puppies ever born as a result of insemination of the dam with preserved semen sent from one continent to another were given a "coming out" party on August 31 at the Hotel Roosevelt, New York City. Eleven attempts to inseminate bitches artificially were made before success came with the Beagle litter. First work involved Greyhounds, but later a change was made to Beagles. The successful insemination was made with preserved semen 140 hours old (the average survival time for normal dog semen is only about 20 hours) containing only 30 per cent motile sperm.